

WHITNEY MUSEUM  
OF AMERICAN ART

COLLECTION IN CONTEXT

**BREUER'S WHITNEY**  
AN ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

SEPTEMBER 11–DECEMBER 8, 1996



*Whitney Museum of American Art Sectional Diagram, c. 1964*

The Collection in Context series typically focuses on a work or group of works in the Whitney Museum's Permanent Collection. This exhibition however, presented on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Marcel Breuer building, examines the architecture of the Whitney Museum as a work of art in its own right and as an environment that determines the way we look at art. Guest curator Nicholas Olsberg has created a thoughtful and carefully researched exhibition, tracing the history of the Whitney Museum buildings with particular attention to, and analysis of, Breuer's Whitney. In his essay he raises provocative questions: Are the Whitney galleries truly neutral spaces for the display of contemporary art? How does the building retain the intimacy of the earlier Whitneys on 8th Street and 54th Street while simultaneously making way for new, larger contemporary art?

It is particularly appropriate that the Museum present "Breuer's Whitney: An Anniversary Exhibition" now, as we embark on a new phase of building activity. In 1997, in order to show more of the treasures from the Permanent Collection on a regular basis, the Whitney will increase its exhibition space by roughly one third. The renovation, designed by New York architect Richard Gluckman, reconfigures the Museum's fifth floor and mezzanine (which currently house the administrative offices) to create a permanent home for the Museum's pre-World War II works, as well as for prints, drawings, and photographs. Just as the Breuer building shifted the way the Whitney Museum was viewed by the public and utilized by its curators, so too will the Gluckman renovation. It is our expectation that the new galleries will not only expand the space of the Museum but will expand the way we think about and present American art.

Adam D. Weinberg  
Curator, Permanent Collection

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## BREUER'S WHITNEY: AN ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

"It can't be strong enough in New York to stand on its own feet....Its form and its material should have identity and weight....in the midst of the dynamic jungle of our colorful city. It should be an independent and self-relying unit...and at the same time...transform the vitality of the street into the sincerity and profundity of art."

—Marcel Breuer, November 1963

Marcel Breuer's new Whitney Museum opened to great fanfare and amidst "a storm of controversy" on September 28, 1966. In the thirty years since, its status has changed dramatically. What was once condemned and praised as an "aggressive" and "brutish" assault on the conventional fabric of New York is now loved and defended as a fond city landmark. This self-consciously solemn building—which had difficulty accommodating the playfulness, intimacy, warmth, and catholicity that the founders of the Whitney cherished—now symbolizes, perhaps even generates, the brash and casually radical image the Museum has cultivated for a generation. This anniversary exhibition invites a second look at Breuer's intentions and at how he gradually balanced them against the newly public Whitney's still uncertain sense of its self. "Breuer's Whitney" examines the building's successes and failures (most notably in its inherent antagonism to



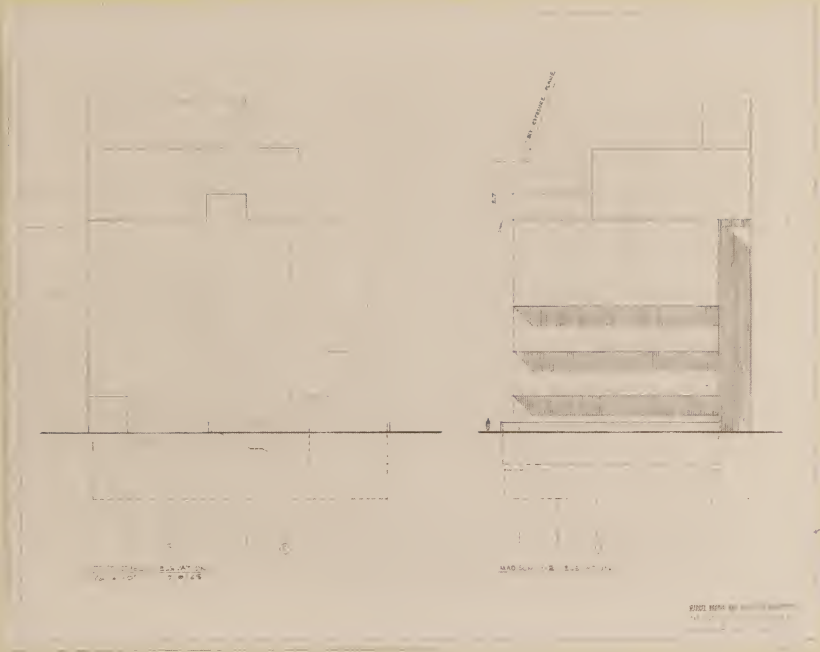
AUGUSTE L. NOEL, *Perspective Study, West 54th Street Building* c 1949

expansion and change). Above all, it tries to show how the very identity of a public institution—its programs, its image, and its values—is changed and advanced by the architecture that houses and represents it. As Michael Graves acknowledged when first tackling the problem of adding to it, Breuer's building "has become synonymous with the Whitney. It isn't first a building that then houses the Whitney—it is the 'Whitney.'"

The Whitney Museum was founded by an American artist, for independent American artists, as a practical and sometimes combative response to the dominance both of the academic tradition at home and of an evolving taste for the European avant-garde. The Museum traces its roots back to 1905–07, when the sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney first sought to acquire, sell, and exhibit the work of her fellow artists in her MacDougal Alley studio. Mrs. Whitney's programs slowly became formalized—first in the Whitney Studio (1914–17), housed in an adjacent town house; then at the Whitney Studio Club (1918–28), in a row house at 147 West 4th Street; and briefly (1928–30) in the expanded Whitney Studio Galleries at 8 West 8th Street. The program in each of these early manifestations was consistent: in the words of the Museum's founding director, Juliana Force, the Whitney was "a threshold for young artists...a place for experiment," and was interested in supporting these artists not only through sales and acquisitions but through exhibitions. The buildings and installations, designed by Dorothy Draper, followed suit—a clublike atmosphere, filled with country furniture, and designed equally to suit a studious young collector and a festive artists' party. The galleries were "full of cleverness" and "independent ideas of gayety. It seem[ed] to be fun to belong."

By 1930, Mrs. Whitney's initiative was so successful that her roster of "independents" was rapidly joining the mainstream. A different approach was needed. "It is no longer necessary," said Juliana Force, "for this organization to help young artists to gain a hearing, what is now needed is a depot where the public may see fine examples of America's artistic production," presented with the "authority and dignity" of a museum. Mrs. Whitney and Juliana Force quickly consolidated and expanded the collection to include some five hundred works (among them fine examples of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art), and began to convert a group of four town houses on West 8th Street. By late 1931, they were able to open the first Whitney Museum, indeed the first museum of American art.

The new premises, converted by Noel and Miller, with interiors by Bruce Butterfield, seemed to reflect both the old Whitney Studio's genteel bohemianism, its informality and exuberance, and the graver new role of museum. Suffused with a faintly Art Deco grandeur and heralded by a formal American eagle over its entrance, the Whitney retained a kind of impish domesticity, stenciling stars and stripes on its walls, greeting the visitor through glass doors engraved with the zodiac, and filling its galleries with furniture. The spirit of such flamboyant group exhibitions as the Studio Galleries' "The Circus



MARCEL BREUER AND ASSOCIATES, ARCHITECTS, *Preliminary Facade Studies*, July 8, 1963

in Paint" (which was as full of sawdust, popcorn, and peanuts as works of art) continued to characterize shows at the Museum, as in the lampposts and traffic signs of "This Is Our City" (1941), while a tradition of crowded and eclectic annual or biennial invitational surveys, begun at the Studio Club, became firmly established.

But progress was checkered. In 1935, the Museum was incorporated; in 1936 its budget was halved. In 1939, Noel and Miller reworked the interior, nearly doubling the gallery space, and installed an experimental cold cathode lighting system. The next year, a merger with The Metropolitan Museum of Art was explored and then abandoned. In 1943, shortly after Mrs. Whitney's death, the Museum closed; nine months later it reopened—but with another Met merger, in a separate south wing designed by Noel and Miller, again in prospect. By 1948, the merger plans had collapsed, and the Whitney took two steps in response. It sold its collection of historic art and determined to move out of Greenwich Village, "no longer the artistic center of New York." The unexpected gift of land at 22 West 54th Street, adjacent to The Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden and linked to Philip Johnson's planned additions to MoMA, made the move a reality. But there were two potentially difficult conditions: the site and building could be bought back by the Modern after a period of years; and the Whitney's building must be made to conform with Johnson's extension.



For the fourth time, the Whitney turned to Auguste L. Noel for its design. Noel worked with Johnson to develop alternatives for the east front (facing the famous sculpture garden). But the Modern rejected his proposal for a masonry, fenestrated east facade in favor of Johnson's carefully worked "van der Rohe design," which incorporated the Whitney firmly into the vocabulary of the Modern. Noel's overall solution was anodyne. Constrained by the Whitney's requests to achieve both a "contemporary" aesthetic and the "warmth of the old building," Noel's 54th Street facade was an uninviting brick box. Lewis Mumford accused it of falling somewhere between "Funeral Home elegance" and "cheap shops and movie palaces." More seriously, it failed to assert a presence on the street, lacking any real articulation except (in a bolder than ever statement of its Americanism) for an overscaled bronze eagle over the door. With public access from within the Modern's extension as well as from the street lobby, the Whitney's independence was dangerously threatened by this design.

The Whitney staff had "hoped to capture in its architecture as firmly as in its activities...the Museum's tradition, its spirit, its individual character," and above all to suggest "an informal museum and a small museum" for "young and experimental artists." But the Whitney also called for "comfortable elegance," and the interiors, again by Bruce Butterfield, mixed materials and colors luxuriously. The result, as Mumford said, was "an architect's sample room," a "colorful but unimpressive fussiness." Noel's and Butterfield's attempts to animate the architecture succeeded in being merely "dull, as in a many colored fabric whose hues have been washed out by too many launderings." Inevitably, the art world began to perceive in the Whitney's programs the same uncomfortable sense of a place neither private nor public, domestic nor civic, savage nor tame.

But three experiments were tried at the 54th Street site that would have consequences for Breuer's design: the addition of a public smoking lounge and quiet spaces to accentuate the Whitney's domestic thread; the inclusion of movable partitions for the painting galleries to allow for rapid turnover of shows; and the elimination of natural light in these galleries, the windows serving "only as an architectural feature to relieve the monotony." Thomas Smith Kelly, who had designed the lighting system for West 8th Street during the 1939 renovation, worked again with cold cathode tubes to light a hung-glass ceiling. He was trying to achieve, as the Whitney had requested, a "conversational" rather than "exclamatory" relation with the work of art, by diminishing the drama inherent in highly focused lighting. Both experiments failed, but both were inextricably bound to the Whitney's modest and generous ethic, in which visitors were invited to locate and "work with" paintings "as in an open park," rather than follow a value-laden prescriptive course. Inside and out, in building and program, by trying to reconcile this ethic of respect for its visitors with the need for a civic presence and with the modernity that could

symbolize innovation, the Whitney, in its years in the shadow of the Modern, failed to establish its distinctive identity.

The 54th Street building took five years to realize, opening only in 1954; six years later the Whitney was ready to abandon it. While attendance had increased, the Museum had come to look like an annex, perhaps a poor cousin, of its mighty neighbor. Moreover, in 1956 a patron's group had been founded, the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art, whose members wanted a more public presence for the institution. Friends acquired works for the collection, sponsored exhibitions, and—having bought a stake in the Museum—demanded a share in its policy-making: in 1961, the Board of Trustees was reorganized to include supporters outside the family, its advisers, and staff. The search for a new, independent home that would assert a clear identity was the first order of business. While larger sites outside the cultural center of Manhattan were considered, the small Madison Avenue corner location had some obvious advantages: it lay midway between The Jewish Museum (then at the leading edge of contemporary art), the Metropolitan and the Guggenheim to the north and the Modern to the south, and on a street becoming crowded with private galleries. Although artists saw the Whitney's move further uptown as yet another step away from its roots in the studio world, others applauded it as a signal that the emerging art the Whitney stood for could now find its place amid privilege and prestige.

The Whitney's building committee wanted a work of art from the start, something to "take its place with" Lever House, the UN, Seagram, and the Guggenheim, and expressed a clear preference for radical architects with no major public buildings in New York. Of the five considered, Louis Kahn and Marcel Breuer both captured the committee's imagination. But Kahn insisted on opening all floors to the streetscape, thus reducing usable gallery space and forcing a higher profile than either budget or zoning seemed to permit. Hence Breuer, an ex-Bauhaus master with twenty-eight years of American work to his credit, was chosen.

The physical constraints on Breuer were severe. On a site less than twice the size of 54th Street, he had to triple the exhibition space, add a library, an auditorium, and a restaurant, and welcome a much larger flow of visitors—all the while keeping the number of floors to a minimum and observing the setback requirements of the neighborhood. At the same time, he was confronted with other mandates: the expanding scale of contemporary art and the Whitney's contradictory demands for an assertive, even "controversial" presence that would announce the experimentation it sought within; a clear "definition, even monumentality that was basic to our program"; and a continued effort to be "as human as possible," to reflect the Whitney's tradition of "warmth and intimacy."

Breuer's basic solution, developed from July to November 1963, was daringly straightforward: invert the setbacks so that (as at the Guggenheim)

gallery space grew as the building rose; sink the plaza this inversion required to serve as a sculpture court, gaining a double floor for monumental works and a bridge and parapet to express the transition from the street; construct a circulation stair in a reveal to one side; eliminate natural light above the two ground floors to maximize gallery wall space; and set the powerful resulting form off from its neighbors by two "framing" partition walls. With this upside-down response to the problems set him, Breuer hoped to achieve something at once poetic and confrontational. Using the language of physics, he saw the framing walls as a device to "transform the building into a unit, an element, a nucleus"; the inversion of the pyramid as "hollow below and substantial on top...the realization of one of [man's] oldest ambitions: the defeat of gravity"; the overhang, the parapet, the bridge, and the glass-fronted street floors as a way of inviting and "receiving" the visitor into a "more enclosed and mysterious" world.

To reinforce the poetic intentions of the building's form, Breuer chose a complementary vocabulary of matter, "unsophisticated close-to-earth materials": coarse granite, split slate floors, bronze fittings and doors, rough canvas gallery walls, and teakwood. He had thought in stone from the first, and the polished granite facing proposed for the exterior carried the heaviest symbolic burden: it was to suggest, in its play with raw concrete, the made over the unmade; in its machine finish, a citified contrast with the handcrafted interior; and in the slight reflections of its surface, the transmutation into stillness of the "frantic" urban jungle the visitor would leave behind. All of this was, in effect, "an attempt to form the building itself as a sculpture." At the same time, as Breuer later confessed, "maybe I built it to rebel against skyscrapers and brownstones."

As Breuer and his partner, Hamilton Smith, worked with the Whitney to detail and refine this scheme (no alternatives were developed), some of the spareness and power of the original idea was whittled down. While Breuer proclaimed that "our building does not have any use for windows," he conceded that the effect may be "too monumental and monolithic," and added the oblique, trapezoidal forms to meet the committee's concern about claustrophobia and disorientation. He agreed to soften the dark, reflective granite facing, substituting an opaque, flame-finished stone in a lighter tone. He took the canvas off the gallery walls and (after a rainy opening night at 54th Street) agreed to add a canopy over the bridge. A spiral stair from lobby to sculpture gallery, which would have drawn the eye quickly down, was abandoned in favor of the less dynamic corner steps. While the fundamentals of shape, facade, materials, and sequence remained, the sculptural force was subtly compromised. Nevertheless, in the wonderfully abstract forms of the lobby desk and shelves ("conceived as sculpture"), the "toe slots" in the stairs, the pattern of lights that creates the entrance ceiling, even a little umbrella stand for the coatroom, Breuer's central idea was evident: that mind and hand, form and matter could work together to make a world of "concentration."





EZRA STOLLER, *Sculpture Court and Gallery*, 1966. Ezra Stoller © Esto. All Rights Reserved

It is clear that Breuer and the Whitney had learned much from the experience at 54th Street. In many ways the new building took the same approach but did it much better: enclosed gallery floors with no skylights; a sculpture gallery that moves from indoors to out; a low glass front; weight and solidity. Nowhere are the lessons of 54th Street more obvious than in the galleries. Again, the Whitney called for neutrality and flexibility, a "simple, uniform and unpretentious background" for the works. To gain space and adaptability, the rooms were spanned only by two long steel beams, leaving uninterrupted space for installation; a 17' 6" ceiling height was gained on the fourth floor, anticipating ever larger works of art; and a system of movable partitions, flush to floor and ceiling, was developed. The partitions in turn determined the lighting system, a coffered concrete ceiling grid, into which the panels slotted and from which the ambient lighting emerged, the effect suggesting another abstract sculpture.

The panels and lighting worked brilliantly over the years, though the former have been abandoned. However, with galleries planned on the traditional division between painting and sculpture, the Whitney's exhibition spaces quickly became outdated. Both the original Lobby Gallery (which had been furnished for Happenings) and the sculpture court and gallery were better suited to art before 1966 than to anything that came after it. The concept of great scale and openness in the main galleries was also challenged by new tendencies in

the art of the time. Breuer had seen these galleries with very specific types of work in mind: standing or hanging sculptures, painted canvases or panels. When works of art appeared that were themselves concerned with scale and space, sat on the floors, or enfolded the viewer (as in the exhibition "Anti-Illusion," 1969), Breuer's studied ceiling grid and chiseled floors looked anything but neutral, and the great height and depth of the fourth-floor gallery served perhaps to diminish any work whose *point* was its own massive presence or field.

Above all, the intimate side galleries (initially planned for the north side of each gallery floor) proved problematic, demonstrating very clearly both the ambiguities of the Whitney and the unpredictability of art in the late sixties. Here the Whitney had tried again to recapture its 8th Street past: paneled, furnished rooms with a clublike atmosphere (writing desks appeared on the second floor), in which temporary exhibitions could be given "context" by selections from the Permanent Collection, in which a memorial gallery of Gertrude's work could be housed, and in which the Museum's works could be seen "in an everyday setting...as if in a home or office." The incongruity of these little galleries—they were finally built on the second and fourth floors only—was rapidly recognized ("Danish modern tastefulness," one critic called them) and as rapidly abandoned by curators who needed a continuous flow. Oddly, Breuer himself liked them precisely because they relieved the monumentality of his "great halls." But they demonstrate perfectly how quickly the Whitney's identity crystallized around its new building. Breuer's building was seen as radical from the first, and the Whitney came to seem "radical" with it. In that context, these reminiscences of the Museum's "domestic" past were plainly irrelevant.

It is odd that the Whitney came so soon to stand for something radical. Critics for the most part saw it as "gloomy," "opaque and charmless," "a dignified...fellow, quiet, urbane." Few agreed with Peter Blake that it was "expressive of the inherent irreverence and radicalism of art," and even its admirers found it grave—something "impressive in a stygian way" that "rests solemnly on its own shadows." But the public found it startling, and it became for a time, as Ada Louise Huxtable reported, "the most disliked building in New York." Nevertheless, the *New Yorker* critic, feeling that Breuer had successfully overturned the traditional concept of the museum, could say, with a notable lack of prescience: "It will be a long time indeed...before any architect planning a museum turns his eyes in the direction of the Parthenon."

Breuer claimed that his building took "no account of expansion, since the Whitney has no control over adjacent properties." But the framing wall on the south side and the great staircase were built with break-through capability, and the Whitney began acquiring buildings on the rest of the block as soon as the new design was ready. By early 1975, the board was already calling for a study

of space needs, and by spring 1976 the idea of a major expansion program was well established. As Michael Irving, the consulting architect, reported, "vertical expansion...was never contemplated as a design strategy, horizontal...along Madison Avenue being the accepted and agreed upon solution."

Pressure to expand came from five directions. The Breuer building and the new image it promoted had encouraged massive new donations to the Permanent Collection. Temporary exhibitions were getting larger and staying up longer. Education programs were dispersed, and the auditorium was incapable of providing for an animated public program. The building itself was proving frustrating and intractable: the side galleries quickly lost their place as a locus of quiet exhibitions of "contextual" material and became an awkward part of the general flow of traffic; the sculpture court and gallery had given way to restaurant and circulation space; and the "flexibility" of the main galleries was becoming an inflexible obstacle to the presentation of exhibitions that sought—like Robert Venturi's design for "200 Years of American Sculpture"—a sense of historical allusion, enclosure, perspective, and defined space, qualities associated with the new aesthetics in art and architecture alike. In this exhibition, Venturi "took on" Breuer in a fascinating attempt to shock the galleries out of their modular, open-plan language. Michael Graves, in his successive schemes for additions, took up, on a grand scale, the same challenge of incorporating Breuer's modernism—an abstract free-form independent of its surroundings—into a composition based on his own essentially figurative and contextual language, and with his eyes firmly "in the direction of the Parthenon."

Graves had expressed an interest in tackling this commission as soon as the Whitney's need to expand was publicized in September 1978. But the Whitney's 1981 selection of this controversial antagonist of modernist conventions was a genuine "leap of faith," not only in a largely untested young architect but also in a radically new traditionalism in architecture. In choosing Graves—Venturi was his closest contender—the Whitney, as its director Tom Armstrong conceded, "knew what we were doing," adding that "anonymous space for art doesn't work." Graves' first scheme, presented to the Board in January 1984, made it readily apparent how different his approach was from Breuer's. Where Breuer found the neighboring brownstones and towers simply "bad buildings," Graves found them "rich and delicate," and tried to "maintain the rhythms" of the street. Where Breuer established a monotone gray sculptural monolith, Graves proposed an assembly of recognizable architectural elements, each distinguished from the other by bright colors and changing materials. Above all, where Breuer sought "free-flowing delicately modulated spaces" and a reversal of architectural conventions, Graves denounced "*flexibility*," decried any design "where walls became windows and windows became doors," and advocated a clearly distinguishable hierarchy of spaces and forms, organized into a formal sequence.

The encounter between these two contradictory approaches to architecture is intriguing: Graves' solution was to set up a "tripartite" composition, adding one structure of matching proportion to the south of Breuer's building; a cylindrical "hinge" between the two, in front of the great staircase; and a massive temple superstructure that would unite both buildings under a form reminiscent of entablature and pediment. The drawn elevation failed to suggest how carefully Graves worked to maintain the sculptural and functional independence and integrity of the Breuer building, or how, on a New York street, the massive superstructure would recede from view. Published in May 1985, Graves' design raised an unprecedented outcry—uniting preservationists with unreconstructed modernists in a strange but potent coalition of nostalgia. Graves refused to compromise on the basic tripartite division of mass, giving Renaissance diptychs, with their central hinges and elaborate overframing, as his precedent and inspiration. But the Whitney and its architect slowly worked together to scale back the new building to offset the expected opposition of the Landmarks Commission. A succession of revisions followed—each moving closer (and perhaps less convincingly) to a compromise with Breuer's formal language. Modifications to the last scheme were still being made as late as September 1988.

Could a new identity for the Whitney have been forged around the accessible, even gaudy showmanship of Graves' scheme? Advocates felt that the proposed plan, by suggesting a dialogue between Breuer's gravity and Graves' playfulness, between modern severity and postmodern familiarity, expressed the very catholicity toward art in America that the Whitney tradition stands for. The controversy over Graves' scheme had, however, scared off the funders, and the hopes for a new Whitney, with a scale and presence that matched its newfound sense of spectacle, died. But the driving need for expansion, especially to accommodate a vastly expanded Permanent Collection, remains.

Working with architect Richard Gluckman, the Whitney's new capital program transfers administrative offices to the adjacent brownstones on 74th Street, renovates the main gallery floors (without changing Breuer's floors, ceilings, or configurations), and converts Breuer's original fifth-floor suite of offices into the sort of quiet and intimate exhibition space for works from the Permanent Collection that Breuer had first planned for the side galleries. Breuer's fifth floor has been both praised and criticized. Borrowing an idea from the 54th Street buildings, he opened curatorial offices onto sculpture terraces, allowing him to extend the vertical profile of the facades despite the reduced footprint of the floor. Critics objected to the sculpted window that punctuates the north terrace wall as a deception: by suggesting an enclosed space, it violated the rigorous relationship between form and function that marks the rest of the building. In fact, the terraces represented an improvised solution—the staff had always envisaged the fifth floor as a completely enclosed

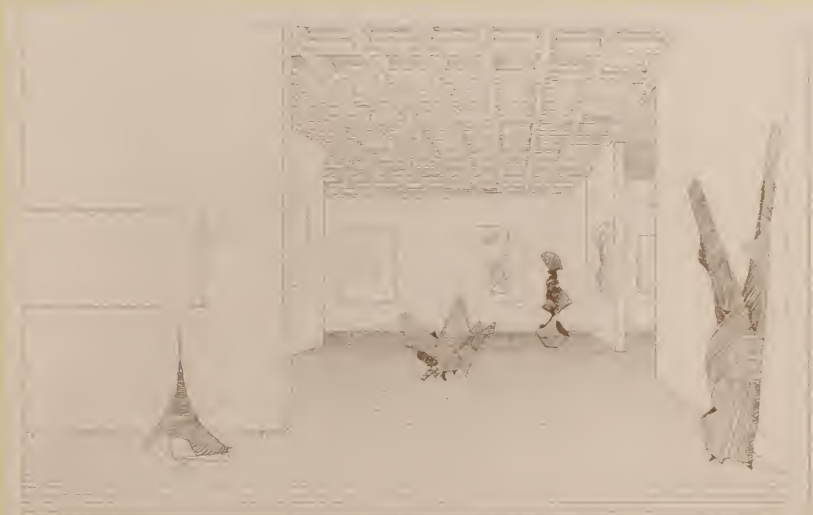


working space. Only budgetary constraints compelled Breuer to reduce this space and invent the open-air alternative.

In bringing Breuer's building back to life, and in subordinating the additions to the existing fabric, the current expansion enshrines Breuer's masterwork rather than confronts it, respecting the building's developing status as a civic icon and acknowledging its symbolic role as emblem for all that happens inside it. We are left with the question of how an architecture so solemn in conception has come to stand for—and even advance—the lively and rebellious reputation of the institution within its walls.

Nicholas Olsberg  
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\*Much of the research for this essay and exhibition was conducted by Elspeth Cowell. It is drawn from documents in the archives of the Whitney Museum, the drawings of Marcel Breuer at Syracuse University Library, and interviews and oral histories (Archives of American Art) with Hamilton Smith, Michael Irving, B.H. Friedman, Flora Miller Biddle, Jennifer Russell, the Michael Graves office, and others. Among the published studies on the Whitney's history, I owe a special debt to Avis Berman's *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1990).



MARCEL BREUER AND ASSOCIATES, ARCHITECTS, *Perspective Sketch for Flexible Exhibition Spaces*, c. 1964



## AFTERWORD

In celebration of the Breuer building's thirtieth birthday, Nicholas Olsberg has written an elegant essay about all the Whitney's buildings and building projects, relating changes in the Museum to its different homes. As one of four women, in four generations of one family, who have believed in and nurtured the Whitney Museum of American Art, I have watched and encouraged many of these changes. The first of these women, my grandmother Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, was the descendant of men whose energy through business and railroad enterprises fueled America's nineteenth-century expansion. She used her own abundant energy to create small sculptures and large monuments, of which the largest was the Museum itself. It embodied her passionate ideals. What were these ideals? Do they still exist in the Museum today? Does it matter? If you believe, as I do, that art seeks the truth, reveals our basic human nature, delights us, terrifies us, enables us to see deep down under the world of things and people, and brings us understanding, then it does indeed matter.

For us Americans, a museum of American art is essential. For Gertrude, art was a vital expression of ideas and feelings, and *American* art was the outward manifestation of her country's character, its maturity, and its evolving position of leadership in the world. Here the Whitney has always adhered to its roots: while occasionally exhibiting the work of other countries alongside our own, the Museum has never deviated from its focus on American art.

Gertrude realized that her fellow artists needed a place to show their work, since, for the first half of the twentieth century, it was ignored by most galleries, collectors, and museums. She made a home for American artists, first in her studio and later in nearby buildings, welcoming all who came. Her comprehensive collection, her democratic inclusiveness, mirrored the United States as it made room for great waves of immigrants searching for better lives in a new country. The Museum, both in its previous incarnations as Whitney Studio, Whitney Studio Club, and Whitney Studio Galleries and in its own early years, was an artists' museum, with an artist as president and artists as curators. On 54th Street, as the staff became more professional, the Whitney, under the presidency of my mother, Flora Whitney Miller, maintained that broad catholicity of purchases and exhibitions.

With the move to the Breuer building in 1966, a new group of young curators, working under directors Lloyd Goodrich and John I.H. Baur, responded to new ideas and new forms of art: multimedia and large-scale works, Minimalism, Pop, film, performance, music, Happenings, and more burst exuberantly into the Whitney's dignified granite and slate spaces. Suddenly, the program seemed as radical as the building! In 1974, a director from the new generation, Tom Armstrong, sought a thoughtful consolidation of the Whitney's new role. An increased emphasis on quality reflected changes in the

art world: the ability of many artists to make a good living from their art and the increasingly large number of galleries eager to show their work; New York's position as capital of the art world; and, ironically, the Whitney's lack of storage space. The Whitney was no longer an artists' museum, it was a public museum, with responsibility for being selective, making judgments, and presenting the best of American art to a larger, more educated audience.

This change was proper and natural, it seems to me, and, as president and chairman of the Whitney, I worked with Tom to achieve such goals as an increased emphasis on the Permanent Collection and the acquisition of masterpieces, with more space to show them, for the benefit of this new public. The transformation of the Whitney into a great national and international institution was perfect for the expansive 1980s. Michael Graves' design, commissioned by the Museum in the late 1970s, embodied this grand vision—exhibiting concentrations of works from the collection, with nearby temporary exhibitions illuminating these works—while harking back to the Museum's original character: intimate, playful, welcoming.

Though the Graves project was not realized, the Museum's resolve to increase public access to its collections has remained. Under the directorship of David A. Ross, and the inspired guidance of Leonard A. Lauder and Gilbert C. Maurer, a project to renovate the Breuer building, create new galleries, and relocate the Museum's administrative offices was conceived. Sensitively designed by Richard Gluckman Architects, the new galleries extend Breuer's architectural vocabulary and the continuing dialogue between art and architecture to a much needed, larger public space.

Since the Museum's early days, the necessity of raising operating and acquisition funds has forced certain decisions, not all of them beneficial. In 1949, the Museum sold its pre-twentieth-century collection, but realized only a tiny percentage of those paintings' current value. Moreover, the sale arrested the original plan to make the Whitney a museum of all American art. Given the vastly higher prices and scarcity of the older work in recent years, it is no longer possible to replace these works. The biggest change in the Museum's structure, however, took place in the 1950s, when new patronage, outside of the Whitney family, brought fresh ideas, enthusiasm, money, and strong leadership. It has enabled survival and growth and has made the Breuer building and the current expansion possible.

Continuity as well as change is essential for such institutions as museums, and especially for one with a personal history like the Whitney's. An institutional memory reminds us of our traditions: the inclusivity, still maintained, for example, in eclectic Biennial Exhibitions; our legacy of support for living artists; a sense of playfulness, already seen in exhibitions such as "The Circus in Paint" at the Whitney Studio Galleries and still remaining in 1982, when clowns and even an elephant from the Barnum and Bailey Circus came to the Museum to help raise money to purchase *Calder's Circus*. Today,



MICHAEL GRAVES, *Madison Avenue Elevation Study for Proposed Whitney Museum Extension*, July 1980

Gertrude's great-granddaughter, Fiona Donovan, an art historian and an active trustee, ensures that continuity.

Perhaps the Whitney's greatest strength is its flexibility. It has responded to its own needs as well as to changes in the art world. It has expanded its board from a few family members to a large and varied group of distinguished, accomplished men and women. It has wandered between a populist and a scholarly approach—from the socially conscious "Human Concern/Personal Torment" to "Blam!," a careful and lively examination of the roots of Pop Art. It has been both adventurous and conventional—the first museum to have an avant-garde film and video program, while also devoting a floor to the Permanent Collection. Its enthusiasm for trends in the art world has incurred the wrath of critics, but what could be more pertinent to our mission of showing and buying what is current? The course of our history always veers a little, but we must guard against allowing the ever-increasing need for money to drive our programs, we must remember to hew to the old tradition of staff autonomy—and I am proud to believe that we will. Surely the Whitney's twin tendencies to be both traditional and innovative will serve it well into the next century, and its joyful spirit will be continually renewed.

Flora Miller Biddle  
Honorary Chairman, Board of Trustees

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

### WEST 8TH STREET BUILDING Drawings and Plans

ROBERT E. LOCHER (1888–1956)  
*Blueprint Design for Eagle Insignia*,  
October 13, 1938  
Blueprint, 16 1/2 x 20 1/2  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

### Documentary Photographs

BERENICE ABBOTT (1898–1991)  
Installation view, "Annual Exhibition of  
Contemporary American Painting,"  
November 1945–January 1946  
Gelatin silver print, 7 1/2 x 10 1/2  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

SAMUEL H. GOTTSCHO (1875–1971)  
*Gallery, West 8th Street Building*, c. 1932  
Gelatin silver print, 14 1/4 x 17 3/4  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

*Print Room, West 8th Street Building*,  
c. 1932  
Gelatin silver print, 12 x 9  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

NYHOLM AND LINCOLN (1929–c. 1934)  
*Facade, West 8th Street Building*, c. 1931  
Gelatin silver print, 7 3/4 x 10 1/4  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

*Entrance, West 8th Street Building*, c. 1932  
Gelatin silver print, 10 x 8  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

*Vestibule Doors, West 8th Street Building*,  
c. 1932  
Gelatin silver print, 10 3/8 x 8 3/8  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

CHARLES SHEELER (1883–1965)  
*Office Interior, Whitney Studio Club, 10 West  
8 Street*, c. 1928  
Gelatin silver print, 7 1/2 x 9 1/4  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;  
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney  
93.24.2

Attributed to Charles Sheeler  
Installation view, "First Annual  
Sculpture Exhibition," Whitney Studio Club,  
March 1928  
Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

Installation view, "First Annual  
Sculpture Exhibition," Whitney Studio Club,  
March 1928  
Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

SOICHI SUNAMI (1885–1971)  
Installation views, "The Circus in Paint,"  
Whitney Studio Galleries, April 1929  
Two gelatin silver prints, 7 3/4 x 9 3/4  
and 8 x 10  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

DEWITT CLINTON WARD  
*MacDougal Alley in Early Spring....*, c. 1906  
Photomechanical reproduction, 8 x 10 3/4  
Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

WILLIAM WINTER (1899–1936)  
*Entrance Lobby, Whitney Museum, 10 West  
8 Street*, 1932  
Gelatin silver print, 13 5/8 x 10 11/16  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;  
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 93.26.1

*Lobby Chandelier, Whitney Museum, 10 West  
8 Street*, 1932  
Gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 x 13 3/4 (irregular)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;  
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney  
93.26.2

### WEST 54TH STREET BUILDING Drawings and Plans

PHILIP JOHNSON (b. 1906)  
*Whitney Museum of American Art, Garden  
Elevation Study, West 54th Street Building*,  
c. 1949  
Pencil on vellum, 15 x 21 1/8  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

*Whitney Museum of American Art, Garden  
Elevation Study, West 54th Street Building*,  
c. 1949  
Pencil on vellum, 14 3/8 x 21 1/8  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

THOMAS SMITH KELLY

*Diagram of Gallery Lighting, West 54th*

*Street Building*, c. 1949

Gelatin silver print, 8 1/2 x 11

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

AUGUSTE L. NOEL (1889–1964)

*Perspective Study, West 54th Street Building*,

c. 1949

Color rendering, 13 3/4 x 18

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

## Documentary Photographs

EZRA STOLLER (b. 1915)

*Gallery, West 54th Street Building*, 1954

Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

Ezra Stoller © Esto. All Rights Reserved

*Lobby, West 54th Street Building*, 1954

Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

Ezra Stoller © Esto. All Rights Reserved

## MADISON AVENUE BUILDING

### Drawings and Plans

MARCEL BREUER AND ASSOCIATES.

ARCHITECTS (1937–76)

*Preliminary Facade Studies*, July 8, 1963

Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 21 1/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Alternate Title Sheets for Presentation*

*Drawing Set*, November 1963

Collage on linen, 32 x 42; printed image on

waxed paper, 33 1/4 x 42 3/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Elevations for Final Scheme*, January 6, 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 27 5/8 x 45 1/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections

*Plans and Sections for the Main Staircase,*

*with Building Profile*, January 10, 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 32 x 42

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Sketch of Reflected Ceiling Plan for Lobby*,

April 15, 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 20 7/8 x 28

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Revised Bridge Design*, April 21, 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 26 1/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Model for the Whitney Museum*,

c. April 1964

Model by Pierre Lutz and Associates

Mixed media, 33 1/4 x 31 1/4 x 16

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

*Axonometric Drawing for Lobby Desk-Top*,

c. 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 26 x 42

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Cut-Away View of Flexible Exhibition Spaces*,

c. 1964

Collage on linen, 32 x 21 1/2

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Perspective Sketch for Final Scheme*, c. 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 21 x 30 1/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Perspective Sketch for Flexible Exhibition*

*Spaces*, c. 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 14 x 20 1/2

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Plan and Elevation for a Proposed Spiral*

*Staircase in the Lobby*, c. 1964

Pencil and colored pencil on tracing paper,  
29 1/4 x 18

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Reflected Ceiling Plan for Galleries*, c. 1964

Pencil on tracing paper, 31 3/4 x 35 1/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

*Studies for an Umbrella Stand*, c. 1964–65

Pencil and colored pencil on tracing paper,  
14 x 14 and 13 x 13 3/4

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York



## RICHARD GLUCKMAN ARCHITECTS

(1977–)

Musheer Siddiqi, renderer

*Interior Perspective View for Proposed Fifth-Floor Renovation*, 1995

Pencil and colored pencil on vellum, 20 x 26  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

*Interior Perspective View for Proposed Fifth-Floor Renovation*, 1995

Pencil and colored pencil on vellum, 20 x 26  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

## MICHAEL GRAVES (b. 1934)

*Madison Avenue Elevation—Scheme 1 for Proposed Whitney Museum Extension*, 1985

Colored pencil and pencil on tracing paper,  
23 x 23

Michael Graves Architect, Princeton

*Madison Avenue Elevation—Study Sketch for Proposed Whitney Museum Extension*, 1985

Colored pencil and pencil on tracing paper,  
9 x 11 1/4

Michael Graves Architect, Princeton

*Madison Avenue Elevation—Scheme 2 for Proposed Whitney Museum Extension*, July 1986

Colored pencil and pencil on tracing paper,  
23 x 23

Michael Graves Architect, Princeton

*Madison Avenue Elevation—Study for Proposed Whitney Museum Extension*, February 1988

Colored pencil and pencil on tracing paper,  
23 x 23

Michael Graves Architect, Princeton

*Madison Avenue Elevation—Scheme 3 for Proposed Whitney Museum Extension*, August 1988

Colored pencil and pencil on tracing paper,  
22 1/2 x 23

Michael Graves Architect, Princeton

## DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHS

### PETER MOORE (1932–1993)

Installation views, "Anti-Illusion:

Procedures Materials," May–July 1969

Three photographic contact sheets, 8 x 10,  
8 1/2 x 11, and 8 x 10

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

©1969, Peter Moore. New York

### STEPHEN SHORE (b. 1947)

Installation views, "200 Years of American Sculpture," March–September 1976

Two color photographs, 8 x 10 (each)

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

### EZRA STOLLER (b. 1915)

*Exterior Views*, 1966

Three gelatin silver prints (1996 exhibition prints), 8 x 10 (each)

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

Ezra Stoller © Esto. All Rights Reserved

*Interior Views*, 1966

Six gelatin silver prints (1996 exhibition prints), 8 x 10 (each)

Whitney Museum of American Art Archives,  
New York

Ezra Stoller © Esto. All Rights Reserved

### UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

*Construction Photographs*, January 7, 1966,  
July 28, 1965, and May 26, 1965

Three gelatin silver prints, 8 x 10 (each)

Syracuse University Library, Department of  
Special Collections, New York

Front cover: Burt Glinn, *Facade of the Whitney Museum*, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York

Back cover: Ezra Stoller, *Marcel Breuer in Sculpted Window*, 1966. Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York. Ezra Stoller © Esto. All Rights Reserved

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WHITNEY MUSEUM